

Garry Wills

This summer, it's the CIA

Newspapers are no longer given the breathing space of a holiday "silly season." Last summer, the serious business of a president's impeachment kept reporters away from the beaches and crowded them into hearing rooms. The summer before, the Watergate revelations were being made and confirmed.

This summer, each day brings more evidence of CIA wrongdoing — more letters opened, more drugs administered, more leaders plotted against, more dummy corporations set up. It is like Watergate in a number of ways — each revelation leads to other enormities.

There have been some false leads, as in the Watergate case. I never took seriously the charge that Alexander Butterfield was a CIA spy in the White House, for the simple reason that the charge was said to emanate from E. Howard Hunt, who long ago lost contact with reality.

But, despite these false leads, the same pattern we witnessed in Watergate has been repeating itself in the CIA investigation. The original charges, in the *New York Times*, were ridiculed and flatly denied — those contained in the *Washington Post* were ridiculed two summers earlier. We were told that thousands of dossiers were not involved, that there was no "massive domestic spying."

But even the protective Rockefeller Commission found thousands of infrac-

tions — and more are being added daily by the Senate investigators. Illegal mail openings alone number 68,000, admitted by the CIA

From flat denial, defenders of the CIA have retreated to minor quibbles about the meaning of "massive" illegality. And even that ground is being abandoned. It is like the sequence that moved from mockery of Watergate as a third-rate burglary attempt to a series of holding actions and attempts at containment. We found out from the White House tapes how scared and desperate were the men under investigation, while they tried to maintain a confident air in public, counterattacking. We may presume the same busy effort and fear are at work, right now, in men like Richard Helms, William Colby and Henry Kissinger. This time the sitting president is clearly innocent of wrongdoing. But the 40 Committee had the ultimate authority over actions in Chile and elsewhere; and, for all purposes, Kissinger was the 40 Committee.

There are even echoes of the last two summers in reports now surfacing. According to the Nicholas Horrock story in the *Times*, President Nixon told the CIA that money was no object in the efforts to oust Salvadore Allende from the Chilean presidency. Remember the same man's answer to John Dean's guess that a cover-up would take a million or more in hush money? It was the

same as Nixon's response to Richard Whalen, during the 1968 campaign, when the high cost of a special TV broadcast was raised — money's no problem, not when you really want something. And Nixon badly wanted Allende's downfall, just as Robert Kennedy seems to have wanted Fidel Castro's.

The summer revelations have not been as drastic to the public as last year's. A president's fate does not hang on each new bit of testimony. But the consequences of this investigation are arguably even more important. A whole pattern of government arrogance, going far beyond an administration's vindictiveness, is coming into view. A secret bureaucracy of violence and deception has been nurtured in the dark for a quarter of a century. The pressures against its ever seeing daylight were immense. Perhaps the secrecy would have been impenetrable but for what we learned in the Watergate investigation. In that sense, Watergate may have been a blessing in disguise.

We should question power, especially secret power. Our government should be accountable, checked, watched over. All that was clear to the framers of this nation. A rediscovery of such truths is the most appropriate way of celebrating the nation's birth. It can lead, if we have the nerve and honesty, to a rebirth.